



Hard riding and straight shooting

August 1, 2018

Dressed as a cowgirl fresh out of the Old West, Mari Roberson of the Laboratory's Office of the Chief Information Officer waits for the range master to give her the okay to engage the course. Once the signal is given, she presses her horse forward, using subtle body cues to navigate the mount through a challenging pattern.

As she and the horse go through the course, Roberson draws her revolver. Firing off rounds loaded with black-powder blanks, she takes out a series of strategically placed balloons and completes the required pattern.

"Any sport where you can go fast and be judged only by the time clock and the accuracy of your shooting—I am definitely interested," says Roberson about her joy of the sport known as cowboy mounted shooting. "There are some equestrian competitions that rely solely on judges and what and who they like on a particular day. I love competitions where it's just me and my horse against a clock."

The object of the sport is to shoot 10 balloon targets while riding through a variety of challenging courses. The winner of a competition is the person who rides the fastest with the least missed targets.

Mari Roberson fires a round at a balloon while she and her horse charge through a challenging course.

"I've always been a good shot," Roberson admits, "and so being able to do that, along with riding at a gallop, makes for a lot of fun."

Although the origins of this sport hearken back to the Wild West Shows that started in the 1870s, the sport proper began in the 1990s, when the basic rules of the sport were formulated and the Cowboy Mounted Shooting Association established. Roberson has practiced this sport since 2005.

One of the challenging characteristics of this sport is that the patterns used change from competition to competition.

"There are about 100 different patterns," says Roberson, "and you don't know what pattern you'll be riding through until the day of the competition. There are penalties that affect your final time, such as missing targets, knocking over barrels, and going the wrong way in a course."

When it comes to marksmanship, safety is of prime importance. "We use black powder blanks in our pistols," Roberson says. "These blanks are certified to travel a maximum of 20 feet. It's the embers that pop the balloons. That's how we're able to

have spectators watch us in the stands—each course is designed so that it is farther than 20 feet from the stands.”

Roberson says she competes only a few times each year, as the sport can be fairly expensive, particularly when it comes to housing and feeding a horse while traveling. However, she does have a goal for 2018 – to qualify for the World Championship, held in Amarillo, Texas in October 2018.

”My dream isn’t even to win there—it would just be great to compete because I know I can place at this competition.”

Learn more about Mari in [her full profile](#).

Los Alamos National Laboratory

www.lanl.gov

(505) 667-7000

Los Alamos, NM

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